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THE
D U T Y
O F A ^K
SUFFERING CHURCH:

A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED TO A CONGREGATION OF
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
OF
S C O T L A N D,

ON THE NINTH OF FEBRUARY MDCCLXXIX,

BEING A DAY OF
GENERAL HUMILIATION
IN THAT KINGDOM.

ABERDEEN:
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To the P U B L I C K.

THE following discourse would not have appeared at this time, however much desired by many of those who heard it delivered, if a late publication had not thrown out a piece of information against our Church, as groundless in its nature, as it seems to be invidious in its design—A Popish Writer of high rank, and no mean parts, in attempting to defend some of the Doctrines of his Church against the just and spirited remarks of a Clergyman of our communion, has, without any necessity, or connexion of argument, told the publick, that “the distinguishing tenet of the religious sect that Clergyman belongs to, is an attachment to the unfortunate family of Stuart, in opposition to the present establishment, in consequence of which they refuse all oaths of allegiance to the reigning powers; and from this the sect derives its name of Nonjurants.”

It is needless to point out the obvious tendency of this ill natured observation, which, every person must see, is designed to represent us in a very obnoxious light to the “reigning powers,” by accusing us not barely of an attachment to an unfortunate family, which indeed could never hurt us in the eyes of the generous and humane, but of persisting in that attachment, “in opposition to the present Establishment,” which this enemy of the poor Nonjurants says, with as little truth as propriety, is the distinguishing tenet of what he is pleased to call our “religious sect.” I wish he had considered with how bad a grace this accusation comes from any of *his Sect*, of whom we may justly ask, what it was that made that family *unfortunate*, to which we are said to be attached, and whether a Pope (whom he acknowledges to be, tho’ not infallible, yet the *chief Pastor*, and *Head of the Church*) had not a considerable hand in their misfortunes?

But I would only beg of this angry gentleman, to lay his hand to his heart, and say, on the word of a Clergyman, whether at the very time this foolish uncharacteristic observation dropped from his pen, he did not know, and verily believe, that there were several other tenets, as material at least as what he adduces, by

which we, as a *religious Society*, are distinguished, not only from his party, but from the other denominations of Christians in this country? How uncandid therefore was it, not to say worse, to fix upon a point of which his party, till of late, were thought to be as tenacious, as he dares suppose us to be, and hold it up to those whom he now pretends to flatter, not as a tenet in general among others, but as *the* distinguishing tenet, the principal, if not the only mark, by which our *religious Sect* (as he contemptuously terms it,) is to be distinguished from our countrymen?

It is in this manner that he pretends, and I suspect from no very generous motive, to publish our political Creed, in which, he says, "we imagined the Papists agreed with us." And no doubt he supposes, with equal ignorance of our principles, that we are greatly mortified at the disappointment we have met with. But he forgets that there is really no just connexion between a *political* Creed, and a *religious* Sect; and that the former is not always a true criterion, whereby to distinguish the latter. That it is not so in our present case, I think, I may safely affirm: And tho' it did not come within my design, to shew what are our distinguishing tenets as a religious society; yet what I have said with a view to our duty considered as a suffering Church, may be sufficient to prove, that, notwithstanding the illiberal charge brought against us, by a writer who boasts much of his candour, and the suspicions perhaps too generally entertained to our prejudice, all our *tenets* are perfectly consistent with the peace of society, and all our *attachments* harmless and inoffensive.

To display our principles in this true light, fair and clear as the sacred purity of the source whence they are drawn, was the reason of my preaching the following sermon to my own congregation on a late solemn occasion, and is now the only motive for publishing it to the world. It is far from being so complete a draught as an abler hand would have produced, either of our situation, or our duty, as a spiritual society: But in the short sketch I have given of both, I hope it will not be found, that I have misapplied the meaning of my text, or mis-

represented that primitive plan of ecclesiastic polity, after which the constitution of our Church is now happily formed. I frankly own, that the experience I have had of this privilege, strengthened by the similarity so visible between our Church, and the several national Churches for the first three hundred years after Christ, has confirmed me in the sentiments I have expressed in the following discourse: Sentiments which perhaps might have appeared uncouth while the remembrance of state connexions lasted, but which by us now, who have no such remembrance, and can divest ourselves of every idea of that kind, may be entertained without scruple, and professed without reluctance.

While we enjoy our present freedom and purity in all points essential to the being of a Church, we have the less reason to regret those legal restraints which have been laid upon the profession of our principles in the way of publick worship. Duly sensible of the lenity of the present Government, the consciousness of our own peaceable and grateful intentions encourages us to hope, that we shall no more feel the severity of any statutes that may remain in force against us, and the repeal of which we shall never crave, till the wisdom of the nation sees it expedient.

The making this honest, and seasonable declaration, I have good ground to believe, will be very agreeable to many of our communion, both clergy and laity; and some particular circumstances have induced me to present it in this form to the publick notice. There are many among us who would have done it to much better purpose, but none could have undertaken it with greater sincerity, or a more conscientious veneration for those sacred truths which are the glory of our profession, and in the support of which alone we wish to be distinguished. In maintaining and promoting these, as far as my weak ability permits, I shall always think myself happily employed; desiring no greater earthly honour than to be esteemed a Friend to my country, a Lover of peace, and a dutiful and well affected

P R E S B Y T E R

February }
22d, 1779. }

Of the Episcopal Church of Scotland.

J E R E M I A H xxix. 7.

SEEK THE PEACE OF THE CITY, WHITHER
I HAVE CAUSED YOU TO BE CARRIED
AWAY CAPTIVES, AND PRAY UNTO
THE LORD FOR IT; FOR IN THE PEACE
THEREOF, SHALL YE HAVE PEACE.

FROM your appearance here this day, my friends, I presume you have all esteemed it your duty to join in this becoming act of national piety, which is founded on a religious sense of our national dependance upon God. The political causes which have given rise to the solemn humiliation of this day, being, in my opinion, no proper subject to be discussed in this place, I think myself happily relieved from running out into that spacious field of enquiry, where so many abler hands have been now so long, and so unsuccessfully employed. A great deal, you know, has been said, and written, and published, on both sides of the unhappy dispute in which our country is at present engaged; and where the passions and interests of mankind are so nearly concerned, it is no easy matter to come at the truth, and no less difficult to adhere to

what is right, in opposition to some favourite scheme of worldly prosperity. Sensible of my insufficiency to enter into the merits of this great controversy, and convinced that it has nothing to do with the due observation of this day's solemnity, I shall content myself with this obvious remark, that we are often mistaken in tracing the source of our political evils from secondary causes only. Nothing is more common than to resolve them all into the clashing of human interests and passions, the imprudence of governours, and the misconduct of statesmen. The worldly mind is satisfied with this narrow prospect; while the religious soul delights itself with a more comprehensive view of things. Blessed with the light of divine revelation, it looks beyond the actions of inferiour instruments, to the agency of a superintending Deity, who, tho' he generally works by human means, never fails to accomplish his own wise and gracious purposes.

This is a truth confirmed by the observation and experience of all ages, that there is no wisdom, or counsel, or understanding against the Lord: And what the scripture teaches upon this point, is as agreeable to our belief of the divine Omnipotence, as beautifully represented by the inspired writers, that God often disappoints the best concerted measures, baffles the mistaken policy

of men, and brings about a new scene of things thro' unheeded, unsuspected methods, which they could not foresee with all their skill, nor prevent by all their prudence. As sure as there is a God who governs the world, and who can do whatsoever pleaseth him, both in the armies of heaven, and in those of earth, so certain it is, that human means alone cannot insure success, and that except the Lord keep our cities, the watchmen of the state will wake in vain. Who is there among us that hath not experienced many strange vicissitudes even in the common affairs of life? But the events of war are of all others the most fluctuating and uncertain; and the leaders of armies would always do well to remember what the king of Israel said to the insulting Syrian, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself, as he that putteth it off." The battle is not always to the strong, much less to the vainglorious; and he who sets out in all the confidence of military dignity, to wreath the yoke about the necks of his enemies, is very often the first that feels the weight of those chains, which he had prepared for his too much despised foes. As no human eye can foresee the various accidents, which may defeat the most promising measures, and blast the fairest hopes of success, we ought not in times of

B 2

national danger, to lean on the broken reed of human strength and wisdom, but look up for support and protection, where religion directs, to that God in whose hands are the issues of war, and who can, when he pleases, dictate the counsels of peace.

Impressed, I hope, with a just sense of these truths, we are now assembled to implore the never-failing aid of the Almighty, and to testify our humble dependance upon him, who "hath moved and divided our land, that he will again heal the sores of it," and restore health and soundness to our body politic. This is the pious and charitable design, for which, (by the permission of my ecclesiastical superiour) I have called you together to join in the national solemnity of this day: And I trust we have no other view in appearing here upon this occasion, but to perform a pure and voluntary act of religious homage to God, undebaſed by the polluting mixture of any worldly motives, unworthy of sincere christians. Let those who know what it is to bask in the sunshine of civil establishment, display before men the splendid blessings of their prosperous state, and bend to earthly powers for the continuance of them; while we, from under a cloud indeed, but in the beauty of holiness, unto Jehovah bow, and pray to him for the peace of Jerusalem, and also for the safety and prosperity of all those

whom his providence hath raised up to favour and befriend his faithful people.

Such being the purpose of our present meeting, I thought I could not find a passage of scripture so descriptive both of our situation, and our duty, as that which I have now read before you, as the subject of this discourse. Altho' the resemblance to which I allude may not at first sight appear very striking, yet I am persuaded a nearer view will shew us such a similarity of feature, as will sufficiently justify the comparison I have in my eye, and the use I intend to make of it, upon this occasion. Therefore to set both these in as clear a light as possible, I shall first consider the circumstances of the people to whom my text was addressed, so far as they will be found to coincide with the present situation of that part of the christian church, of which we are members: And then I hope we shall be at no loss to discover our own duty, and be well disposed to pay a chearful obedience to the divine precept before us, "to seek the peace of the land in which we dwell" and to pray, as we do this day, "to the Lord for it, that in the peace thereof, we may have peace."

Were we to consider the holy scriptures merely as a human composition, without regarding their divine original, we could not but admire the surprising contexture of them, and that almost infinite variety of matter contained in so narrow a compass. It would open

a large field of discourse to point out the many important advantages which recommend the inspired writings of the old as well as the new Testament, to our attentive perusal. This however is none of the least considerable, that they abound with observations admirably suited to all the possible situations and circumstances of any single person or public society. They contain not only a general history of providence in ancient times, but a number of wise reflections also, upon particular occurrences, which may be usefully applied by all succeeding ages. It is true that many false and erroneous applications have been made of some transactions recorded in the old testament; because we are not encouraged to make every divine interposition in favour of a *peculiar people*, an object of general expectation: And as little are we at liberty to make every proceeding on their part a general rule of our conduct. At the same time we must acknowledge that every part of their history was written for our learning in some shape or other.

The chief design for which they were separated from other nations seems to have been the preservation of the true religion, and the worship of the true God, the creating and redeeming God, among men. Of this gracious purpose St. Paul gives us a very ample account, when he tells us, that the Israelites were they, “to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and

“ the giving of the law, and the service of
 “ God, and the promises.” ^c These distin-
 guishing privileges shewed that nation to be
 a peculiar inheritance, a people chosen and
 adopted by the true God to serve the purpo-
 ses of his love; acquired and purchased to
 himself, “ by wonders and by war, by a
 “ mighty hand, and an outstretched arm, ac-
 “ cording to all that he did in the land of
 “ Egypt.” ^d The worship of his name was a
 glory which then belonged to them only; and
 they only of all other nations belonged to him,
 so that when Moses was sent to Pharaoh, he
 was not commanded to say, God that created
 heaven and earth, but “ the Lord, the God
 “ of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee.”
 The event shewed what was the important
 end of this commission, even the powerful
 accomplishment of God’s promises to this
 chosen nation, giving them the land of Canaan
 for an heritage, even an heritage unto Israel
 his people.

Considered in this distinguished character,
 as a people dedicated to God, sacred to the
 glory of his name, and chosen to fulfil the
 designs of his mercy, they were the peculiar
 care of Heaven, a nation which above all
 others he delighted to honour. But when
 laying aside that spiritual relation which they
 bore to the God of Israel, we consider them

^a Rom. ix. 4.

^d Deut. xxvi. 8.

^c Exod. vii. 16.

as a civil body composed of men of various humours and different dispositions, some impressed with a just sense of the privileges they enjoyed, and conducting themselves accordingly, while others forgot the author of their blessings, forsook his statutes, and despised his laws: Viewing them in this light, unfavourable indeed to human nature, tho' we ought to pity their weakness, we cannot but condemn their practices, and acknowledge the justice of the severest punishments, denounced by their law against disobedience so perverse, so unjustifiable as theirs was.

Indeed had we the history of the Jews from any other than divine authority, we should be apt to look upon their frequent miscarriages as an improbable fiction. They had motives sufficient to have governed the passions, and kept up the gratitude of any people whatever; Yet how often do we find them revolting from that very worship, which was the glory and defence of their nation, and turning aside to the vain idolatrous services of their heathen neighbours? No sooner were they at any time delivered out of the hand of their enemies, and established in peace and plenty, but they immediately forgot from whence these blessings came, transferred all the honour of them to themselves, "forsook the God who made them, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation",^f

^f Deut. xxxii. 15.

We need not wonder therefore that so many grievous and repeated offences should frequently deprive them of that Almighty protection, which was their only security against the power and envy of the nations around them. Frequent warnings were given them how dangerous it was to provoke the omnipotent guardian of their state, and what multiplied misery would be the consequence of his displeasure. But all in vain. Neither mercies nor judgments, the admonitions of their prophets, nor the example of some of their best kings, could prevail to check the torrent of wickedness and impiety. The hand of the Almighty would no longer strive with them for their amendment, nor remain with them for their defence. The divine protection was withdrawn; and being thus left to themselves, to stand to the consequences of their impious folly, they soon became a prey to that ambition which they had despised before, insensible of the hand that saved them from its effects. They were overpowered by the armies of a victorious monarch, who made an easy conquest of their defenceless city, destroyed their stately temple, ravaged their country, and forced its inhabitants into a disgraceful captivity.

It was in this distressed and seemingly helpless situation, that they received the direction in my text from the friendly hand of an inspired prophet. Previous to this dreadful ca-

calamity, he had given them many serious exhortations to repentance, as the only means to avoid the impending ruin. And now he does not desert them in the day of their calamity, but communicates with pleasure those refreshing discoveries of peace and reconciliation, which succeeded his former threatnings of the divine displeasure.

Here we cannot but observe with satisfaction how God changes his doom, when men change their deeds; and recalls his sentence, when they renounce their sins. We never read that he threatened any person or place with punishment, but if they repented he either withheld it, or deferred it, or abated it to them, and that in proportion to the truth and measure of their repentance. Indeed nothing can be plainer from the whole tenour of scripture, than that God's threatnings as well as his promises, have always a condition annexed to them, which tho' it be but sometimes expressed, yet is still included, and ought to be understood. To convince the house of Israel of this comfortable truth, the same prophet who delivered the direction in my text, had before published a most gracious proclamation of the King of kings. For "at what instant," says God, "I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down and to destroy it: If that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from

“ their evil, I will repent of the evil that I
 “ thought to do unto them “.”

In humble dependence on this merciful promise, which they had formerly too much despised, the exiled Jews now turned from their evil, in hopes that God would also let go his displeasure. The miseries of their reproachful captivity brought them to themselves, and made them look back, with shame and sorrow, on that base ingratitude which had forfeited so many privileges. “ By the
 “ rivers of Babylon they sat down and wept,
 “ when they remembered Sion.”^a The thoughts of that holy worship which they had so long neglected: the sad remembrance of that beautiful temple which they had so often forsaken to join in the idolatrous services of the *groves*; these reflections cut them to the heart, and made the tears run down their cheeks, as they sat in silence by Babel’s hostile streams. But the tears of the penitent God “ puts into
 “ his bottle;”ⁱ preserves them as the precious effects of a Redeemer’s love, that will wipe out the stain of repented guilt. That sorrow which worketh repentance is mingled with hope and comfort; it softens and improves the heart, and brings forth the blessed fruits of peace and joy. So it fared with the Israelitish captives. They *mourned*, as became the church of God, *persecuted, but not forsaken*, and they obtained the evangelical blessing promised by the prince

^a Jerem. xviii. 7. 8. ^b Psal. cxxxvii. 1. ⁱ Psal. lvi. 8.

of peace; *they were comforted.* For so we read, a few verses after my text. "Thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word towards you in causing you to return to this place, for I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil^k". With such a happy prospect of the returning favour of their God, they might well submit with chearful resignation to his kind, tho' correcting hand. Animated with the agreeable thoughts of being restored to the love and protection of their great friend in heaven, they might with pleasure obey his directions with regard to their enemies on earth. When he had laid aside the terrors of his wrath, and restrained, for his name's sake, the effects of his just displeasure, they might well part with their angry resentments, stifle the rising of every revengeful passion; and for their own sakes "seek the peace of the city where they were captives, and pray to the Lord for it, since in the peace thereof they were assured they should have peace likewise."

Now God is not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also. And "Whatsoever things were written afore time," St Paul tells us, were written for our learning^l; for our instruction in the ways of truth and right-

^k Jerem. xxix. 10, 11. ^l Rom. xv. 4.

teousness. The same Apostle, after relating the state and behaviour of the Jewish church in the wilderness, makes this edifying application, "that all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come". The apostle founds the strength of this argument upon the correspondence between the Jewish and christian oeconomy: The Israelites he calls the fathers, as being the spiritual ancestors, from whom christians are descended; and thence infers that they and we are one and the same church, differing only in some outward circumstances proper for distinguishing between faith in a Saviour expected, and in one already come. Hence he concludes, that God's dealings with his church in these typical ages of it, were so many lively images of his dealings with christians in latter times: And the inference which St Paul drew, from parity of reason, and a comparison with the Jews only, we can now strengthen from matter of fact, and illustrate by events that have already befallen several parts of the church of Christ.

To make good this observation I might direct your attention to the woful change that hath taken place in the once highly favoured empires of the East, distinguished by their early attachment to the christian faith in all its purity, and now disgraced by all the

follies and vices of Mahometan superstition. But we need not go abroad to seek for proofs of the mutability of human affairs, while the history of our own country affords such glaring instances of it, presents us on every hand with the ruins of ancient faith, a wreck of privileges, once the boast of our happy forefathers, now the scorn of their scoffing posterity.

I have no occasion to inform you, but for the illustration of my argument, that the spiritual society, of which we profess ourselves members, was once, what we call, a national or an established church, its communion embraced with satisfaction by the generality of the people, and its worship and jurisdiction countenanced by the favour, and supported at the expence, of the state. How far this latter privilege has ever contributed to the purity and permanency of any christian church, I shall not take upon me to determine. One thing I may safely affirm, that when religion is thus connected with mens temporal interests, it is very liable to be perverted by them. Its purity must be in the most imminent danger, when all sorts of people are allured to the profession of it, by the peculiar privileges of a national establishment; Or if we suppose it incorrupted by the encouragement of the state, and unmixed with the folly and wickedness of worldly devices; in that case the preservation of its inward

purity will be daily exposing it to the forfeiture of those external advantages; which it can retain no longer than it submits its heavenly doctrines to the fluctuating policy of earthly kingdoms.

But it will be said, Did not Isaiah prophesy of the church of Christ, that “kings should become her nursing fathers, and queens her nursing mothers?” And must not the faith be very secure under the protection of such powerful defenders? It is no uncommon thing for people to take just as much of a passage of scripture as pleases them, and leave unquoted, however improperly, what does not suit their design. This, I am afraid, is the case here. For those who favour the dependance of the church upon the state, and are fond of applying Isaiah’s prediction to justify it, would do well to consider what follows: “they (these very nursing kings and queens) shall bow down to thee, with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet.” I suspect this part of the prophecy will not be easily reconciled with that supreme authority, which these royal nurses have sometimes exercised over their spiritual children, by dictating to, and even forcing their consciences; or pretending to divest the church of those spiritual powers, on the exercise of which its very being, as a society, depends. In a word, the history of all christian countries abounds with melancholy proofs of what the religion of

Jesus has suffered by being mingled with worldly politicks. Wherever it affects to be supported by secular honours and privileges, it is in continual danger of giving up the substance for the shadow. Whatever the authors of these benefits think fit to require in return for their favours, must be implicitly complied with; and a refusal of such compliance, though grounded upon real scruples of conscience, not only dissolves the boasted union between church and state, but produces such restraints upon the former, as plainly shew the folly and fatal effects of so precarious and ill founded a connection.

It was to this the Episcopal church of this kingdom fell a sacrifice, and hath continued to suffer the consequences of it almost a whole century. She hath been all that time under a sort of exile, banished from the countenance of the great, and exposed to the malice of the mean and uncharitable men of this world. She hath been stripped of all her ornaments, and external advantages: Yet mourning in her ruins she hath still retained her integrity; and by the wise and good providence of God, what she hath lost in her outward appearance, is fully compensated by what she hath gained in the purity of her doctrine, and the decency of her worship. Sensible of her excellence in these respects, we have had the happiness to abide in her communion, under all the restrictions that have been laid upon it. We

have chearfully joined in her holy services thro' the most gloomy period of her captive state; and, far from entertaining any resentment against the authors or instruments of her sufferings, we have frequently humbled ourselves, as we do this day, under the mighty hand of God, saying, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and just are thy judgments!*

HAVING now considered the circumstances of the people to whom my text was addressed, so far as they appear to coincide with the present situation of that part of the christian church of which we are members: And having, I hope, discovered a sufficient resemblance, in a spiritual sense, to lead our thoughts to the consideration of the duty enjoined in the text, as incumbent upon ourselves; I shall therefore proceed to shew how we ought, in compliance with the divine precept before us, to "seek the peace of the land in which we dwell, and to pray to the Lord for it, that in the peace thereof we may have peace."

Of all the comforts of human life, I know none more valuable than peace, whether we consider the extensive nature of this blessing, or its evident tendency to promote our happiness. It hath been justly termed the very soul and life of the world, the great ornament and peculiar grace of human nature, the band and cement of society and conver-

fation, and the happy source of all agreeable intercourse between the sons of men. With good reason therefore did the great friend of mankind pronounce a blessing upon the peacemakers, as being the true children of God; the acknowledged offspring of that merciful Father, who found means to reconcile a guilty world to himself, and thereby established peace on earth, and good will among men. The exercise of this virtue is the truest imitation of our heavenly Master, the proper badge by which we are distinguished as the faithful subjects of the Prince of Peace. "By this," said he, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." This is the mark or sign, by which we shall be known to belong to him; the only convincing demonstration that we are what we profess to be.

Many are the obligations we ly under to the practice of this duty, and strong and affectionate the exhortations we have received from the apostles of Christ, to shew our regard to it, in all its just extent. "If it be possible," says St Paul, "live peaceably with all men^p." The christians at Rome, to whom this advice was given, were but few in number in comparison with their Jewish and Heathen neighbours, and could expect but little quiet in the exercise of their religion, un-

^o John xiii. 35.

^p Rom. xii. 18.

less they conducted themselves with the greatest prudence and circumspection. Very properly therefore does the apostle admonish them to put on the most harmless and inoffensive behaviour, that the holiness of their lives, and peaceableness of their conversation, might recommend both their doctrine and themselves to the good opinion of mankind. To join the harmlessness of the dove to the wisdom of the serpent, was always reckoned commendable even in the most flourishing ages of the church, but is absolutely necessary in such situations as that of the disciples to whom our Saviour first gave the direction. That christians should do their duty without noise, and maintain their principles in a mild and moderate manner, is the repeated voice of those sacred oracles which they are to consult upon all occasions: And when any restraint is laid upon their principles, which obliges them more particularly to walk circumspectly, not as *fools*, but as *wise*, they should remember to seek that wisdom which is from above, which, the Apostle says, is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated:"^a A wisdom that will take them out of the rugged paths of strife and contention, and point out to them the soft and gentle way of heavenly love, that leads to peace here, as well as happiness here-

^a Jam. iii. 17.

after. This is the path of the just, "which
 " shineth more and more unto the perfect
 " day." ^r Clouds may overcast it for a while,
 during the gloomy night of discord that hangs
 over this turbulent world; but the prospect
 brightens the farther we advance, and the
 hand of revelation points to a sanctuary,
 where shines the fulness of everlasting peace.
 Blessed with the direction of this infallible
 guide, what a noble encouragement have
 we to go on in that peaceable way of duty,
 which will certainly conduct us to the pro-
 mised reward? Some difficulties may now
 and then be thrown in the way of our pro-
 gress, by the jarring interests of this world,
 and the influence which these sometimes have
 upon our weak and corrupt passions. But it
 is the glory of our religion to overcome the
 world, to gain a complete victory over all
 those desires and inclinations that are enemies
 to peace. Supposing christians to be such
 happy conquerours, St Peter might well put
 that question; "Who is he that will harm
 " you, if ye be followers of that which is
 " good?" ^s Justly inferring that no person
 would have the hardiness to declare himself a
 professed opposer of that which is good. Yet
 the Apostle himself met with such "*unreason-*
 "*able wicked men,*" ^t as St Paul very properly
 styles them; men who could turn the purest,

^r Prov. iv. 18. ^s 1 Pet. iii. 13. ^t 2 Thess. iii. 2.

most inoffensive principles, into cause of quarrel, and would not suffer any to enjoy peace who made the least scruple to purchase it on their terms. The first converts to the faith of Jesus felt the severity of such unreasonable conditions; and the history of their sufferings is a sufficient warning to all succeeding christians, that however much they may be disposed to seek peace, they will not always find it, without such concessions as, their consciences tell them, are inconsistent with the rest of their duty.

It is peace with God that ought to be the first and great object of all our rational pursuits; and where the laws of our earthly superiours happen to interfere with our obligations to our Lord in heaven, in that case we have only to answer our enemies in the words of the Apostles on a like occasion, "Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." "This was their sensible reply to the supreme council of their nation, when they were charged by it not "to teach or "preach in the name of Jesus." They were well convinced of the great and good design of the commission they had received from their blessed master, and no threats or dangers could prevail on them to betray so important a trust. They gave all due obedience to the

civil power, in every thing that came within its jurisdiction, and chearfully rendered to Cesar, what was Cesar's: But they had no idea of his having any authority in things belonging to God, or any right to deprive them of those spiritual powers, which they had received for certain gracious purposes from the King of kings. Had they been possessed of any such notions of the precarious tenure by which they held their sacred commission, they would not have performed such wonders, nor suffered so much in the execution and defence of it. They would have tamely yielded to the first legal inhibition of the civil power: The voice of the gospel had been soon silenced, and christianity, like an infant expiring from the womb, had only cried, and ceased to breathe. Why then should any who admire the ripening glories of this heavenly institution, pretend to subvert the influence of those very doctrines by which it was daily adorned with increasing strength and vigour? Why should we or any part of the church of Christ be despised on account of our conscientious adherence to principles, absolutely necessary to the support of the christian cause, and perfectly consistent with the peace of every well regulated civil society?

That the spiritual Independency of the church upon the state, according as we believe

it; is an essential article of the christian faith, cannot be doubted, I am certain, by any who sincerely wish well to the truth as it is in Christ. This is a doctrine which I hope none of us shall ever be ashamed to own, or afraid to maintain; since, without our firm belief of it, we should have no security for the preservation of the true religion upon earth, no dependence on his gracious promise, who after he had invested his apostles with their spiritual powers, added this, as an insurance of their duration till he shall come again, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Encouraged by this divine promise, how can it be supposed that any successors of those apostles, who had a just sense of their duty, would tamely resign their spiritual powers into the hands of the state, and so give to Cesar, what was truly God's? All their temporal privileges they might lawfully part with; their secular honours and emoluments they ought readily to surrender, as soon as demanded by the hand that gave them; for this is rendering, or giving back, to Cesar what they had received from him. But an authority which no earthly power can give, it is certain none can take away; and therefore such as have been once duly invested with this spiritual authority, ought not to be condemned as enemies to peace, because they

calmly and quietly persist in the exercise of it. They ought not to be censured as unfriendly to the publick tranquillity, or regardless of their country's welfare, while they strive to advance the credit and promote the influence of that pure undefiled religion, which teaches them to give to all their dues, and to keep themselves, both in principle and practice, "unspotted from the world *."

These, I trust, are the general rules of our conduct; these the motives by which we are induced to abide in the communion of a spiritual society, whose whole oeconomy we believe to be agreeable to the word of God, and formed as near as possible to the model of primitive christianity. And what has any government to fear from a society of this nature, whose members have no other view in adhering to it, but to serve God quietly according to their consciences, and suffer any hardships for the sake of truth and righteousness, rather than disturb the peace of the land in which they dwell?

Such were the avowed principles of the primitive church, during the first three centuries after Christ; and tho' all that time they were exposed almost to continual persecutions, yet no instance can be produced, wherein the christians could be justly accused of seditious practices, or of any attempt to subvert the

* Jam. i. 27.

authority of civil government. When the ruling powers were pleased to shew any favour to their religion, or to allow them a little liberty in the profession of it, they received it chearfully, and were thankful: But when this peaceful calm was interrupted, and the storm broke out afresh, God and a good conscience was all the shelter they sought, prayers and tears were the only weapons they used; and, armed with these, the cause of truth prevailed, and softened the hearts of its bitterest adversaries.

Indeed there was no argument more likely to hurt the progress of christianity, than what its earliest enemies devised against it, when they represented to princes and rulers, that the doctrines of Jesus tended to undermine their authority, and that the preachers of the gospel were turbulent and seditious persons, who were exceedingly troublesome wherever they came, and "attempted to turn the world upside down." It behoved the apostles to clear themselves from the imputation of such base designs, and to shew both by their writings and actions how unjustly they were charged with them. Accordingly they took every opportunity of declaring their abhorrence of those disorderly practices, which tempted men to "despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities." They urged the neces-

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* Acts xvii. 6.

* Jude 8,

city of believing that government was a wise institution, ordained by God for great and good ends, "for the punishment of evil doers, and the praise of them that do well^a." And that of consequence men ought to be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake, and from a serious sense of their duty to God.

Deducing these social virtues from their proper source, we find St. Paul beginning his directions to Timothy, by exhorting him to take great care in the discharge of his important office, "first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men: For kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty^a." This may be called a paraphrase of the words of my text; enlarging, as it were in a christian manner, the sense of the divine precept given to the captive Israelites, to seek the peace of the city where they dwelt, *and pray to the Lord for it, that in the peace thereof they might have peace.* The command in both places is given in general terms, and enforced by an expectation of the same happy effect to be produced by our obedience. Even the apostles more explicit direction does not countenance any officious speciality in our prayers, inconsistent with our notions of that omniscient Deity to whom they are addressed; a God who knows every sovereign's name and title,

^a 1 Pet. ii. 4.

^a 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2,

and will be best pleased with our services, when they refer the decision of all claims of right to his infinite wisdom. While men are compassed with infirmity, and subject to various prejudices, a determination of civil right, which appears clear and evident to one, will be matter of doubt and perplexity to another: And a conscientious person will be afraid to mingle his scruples with the worship of a just and holy God, knowing that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin^b." Yet such a person may be every way well disposed to seek the peace, and pray for the welfare and prosperity of his country; and his supplications and prayers to that effect may be as acceptable to God, when made in general terms for *all that are in authority*, as when restricted to particular forms prescribed by reasons of state. The end proposed by such acts of devotion is to all good christians the same, that in the peace of our country, *we may have peace*, or, as the apostle more fully expresses it, that so *we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness. and honesty.*

This is indeed an object worthy of our earnest wishes, and our most fervent prayers: And we have good ground to believe that our heavenly Father will regard every application that we make to him in the way of his own appointment; regard it as the humble request of his own dutiful children, whom he hath

^b Rom. xiv. 23.

undertaken to provide with every thing that tends to their real peace and satisfaction. But he justly requires of us a filial resignation of all our concerns to his wise and gracious disposal, as an acknowledgement of his goodness, and ability to help us. And he expects too that we give his spiritual blessings the first place in our hearts, and make that peace of his, which passeth all understanding, the principal object of our desires. Had the apostle mentioned only a quiet and peaceable life, as the effect of our pious intercession in behalf of those in authority, it might have been thought a sufficient inducement to the men of this world, to comply with his direction. But the religion he preached required something more as our duty, and promised something higher as our reward, than a quiet and peaceable life *only*. Therefore he takes care to add, that this quiet and peaceable life must be led *in all godliness and honesty*: must be sanctified by the prevailing influence of religion in our minds, and a conscientious regard to the truth and honour of it in all our actions.

This ought to be the great end and design of all our acts of piety, whether publick or private, to cherish and keep alive in our hearts a grateful sense of our dependence upon God, and a humble desire to be preserved in his love and favour. This being once secured by a steady adherence to *godliness and honesty*, we are then to shew, by a holy and unblame-

able conversation, how much we prize the blessing, and by our fervent prayers how earnestly we wish to dispense the comforts, of a *quiet and peaceable life*. For men may talk of godliness what they please, but they are utter strangers either to it, or honesty (as that signifies the decency of a christian carriage) who indulge a factious turbulent spirit, impatient of government, restless and uneasy under every restraint, and ready to break out into acts of violence on the slightest provocation. It is no more than an outward form of godliness which these men put on, to gain their worldly ends; while they know nothing of the true power of it, or that inward force and efficacy which will always accompany this heavenly grace. Where this is lodged in the heart of a christian, it will display its influence in the subduing of every disorderly passion: it will enable us to bear the wrongs and insults of folly and wickedness with patience, and to look down on the malice of trifling sinners with pity rather than indignation: It will exalt our affections to things above, to the sweet enjoyments of everlasting peace, and help us to cultivate love and friendship here below: It will inspire our souls with fervent piety to God, and good will to men, and teach us how to embrace every such occasion as this day presents to us, of praying to the Lord for the peace of our country, that in the peace thereof we may have peace *with him*, may

lead a quiet and peaceable life in all *godliness and honesty*.

I have now, I think, almost finished what I proposed to say upon a subject suitable enough to the design of our assembling here this day. To justify my choice of that passage of scripture, which I have made the foundation of this discourse, I have considered the circumstances of that people to whom my text was addressed, so far as they appear to represent the situation of any suffering part of the christian church; whose duty in such a time of trial, it was my principal design to lay before you, in that plain undisguised manner which was necessary to shew the proper application of it to ourselves. I thank God, I have no other view in what I have said upon this occasion, but, as far as I am able, to plead the cause of truth and righteousness, and maintain the honour of those purely primitive, and inoffensive principles, which I hope will ever distinguish that spiritual society to which we belong. Convinced of their genuine excellency, let us bless the divine Author of our faith, for preserving them so sound and uncorrupted to us, undefiled by civil sanctions, and unenslaved to worldly policy. Influenced by these motives, and allured by these privileges, these spiritual advantages which infinitely overbalance all the temporal conveniencies of legal establishment, let us thankfully embrace

this christian freedom, this truly valuable liberty, and stedfastly abide in that holy communion and fellowship, which holds out such inestimable benefits to us.

We have been too long considered as a discontented party, united in murmuring and complaints, and kept together by foolish hopes of political changes, that might again raise us as high, as now we are low, in the opinion of the world. Vain and deceitful expectations, if we were capable of being blinded by them! No; let us wipe off each foul reproach that stains the heavenly purity of our hopes, and shew how much our profession is injured by being exposed in such a carnal and worldly-minded view. Our expectations rise far beyond the reach of all earthly preferment, and as we have no prospect of advantage from, neither can we have any pleasure in, those tumults and commotions, which are the effects of wild ambition, or liberty degenerated into licentiousness.

Happily removed from every temptation to disturb the publick tranquillity, let us chearfully acquiesce in the wisdom of Providence, which knows always what is best and fittest for us in every capacity, and will make all things work together for good to them that love God, and take delight in conforming themselves to his will. While we live thus in his faith and fear, and trust all our concerns, spiritual and temporal, in his

hands, we shall not fail to enjoy the benefits, and feel the comforts of *his* peace. Nay, we shall be insensibly led to cultivate that, as a duty, which like all our other duties, is held forth as a blessing to us. Peace with the God of love will naturally incline us to wish the like happiness to all mankind, and to seek it more especially in behalf of those among whom we dwell, and with whom we are connected by various ties. This desire of their welfare, will excite all the tender feelings of humanity within our breasts, and help us to the outward practice of every social virtue: It will mingle with our private devotions, and attend us to the house of public prayer. When our piety escapes every eye, but that which seeth in secret, and when it shines out before men to the glory of our heavenly Father, the love of our brethren will shew the sincerity of our love to God, and the peace of our country will be one great object of our daily supplications.

Animated by these pious and charitable motives, so consistent with our avowed principles, the devout employment of this day, I hope, will be acceptable to God, and beneficial to ourselves. It will shew us in a true light to our unprejudiced neighbours, and convince those in power, that our opinions are such as no government needs be afraid to tolerate. And if any ignorant people have hitherto spoken evil of us, as of evil-

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doers, persons that delight in dissention, and opposition to power and authority, they will surely at last be ashamed when they find that they have falsely accused our harmless and peaceable conversation in Christ. In this manner therefore let us continue to adorn our christian calling; always holding fast the truth in love: And always ready to join with sincere and brotherly affection in such acts of publick devotion and piety as are intended to express our national dependence upon God. May he accept the sincerity of our intentions, and hear the prayers of this day that *seek peace* to the land in which we dwell. May *he*, the *only ruler of princes*, inspire the hearts of all our governours, from the *highest* to the lowest, with a becoming zeal for his glory, and the welfare and prosperity of this nation, that so in the peace thereof, we, in union with the whole church of Christ, may have peace, all the days of our life. And to him, the God of peace, be all glory and honour, thro' Jesus Christ, now and evermore. Amen.

THE END.

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